April 18, 2014

Dear Members of the Class of 2018:

As Composition Coordinator at Westfield State University, allow me to welcome you. As you may know, all students at Westfield State are required to take English Composition I (ENGL 0101) in the first semester of their first year of study, and English Composition II (ENGL 0102) in the second semester of their first year of study. These courses are important, as they will prepare you for the writing you are expected to do in college and in your future profession.

Prior to enrolling in English Composition I, however, students must attend a mandatory meeting where you will submit a writing sample (separate from the Accuplacer Math and Reading Tests). The results of this sample, along with student SAT scores determine whether students are to be placed in ENGL 0101 or ENGL 0101-plus workshop, which includes an additional hour of writing instruction per week. This placement test will be administered as part of New Student Orientation. More information about this placement test is included in “English 101 or English 101-Plus: A Guide to Choosing the Right First-Year Writing Course at WSU,” included in with these introductory materials. Please read everything carefully.

To ensure appropriate placement, it is critical that you attend one of the two-day orientation sessions scheduled for June and complete your writing sample at the designated time. As noted on your orientation schedule, you will provide a sample at either 1:30 p.m. or 2:30 p.m. in Wilson Hall Auditoriums A, B, and C on each of the designated orientation days. If you do not attend orientation, you will receive a preliminary placement based on your SAT scores. However, students who do not provide a writing sample at Orientation in June must still visit the English Department to provide a sample upon arriving in the fall. Fall assessment could result in last minute changes to your schedule, thus inconveniencing you considerably.

Feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns. Again, I welcome you to Westfield State College and wish you success in your academic career.

Sincerely,

Jennifer DiGrazia, Coordinator of Composition
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English 101 or English 101-Plus:
A Guide to Choosing the Right
First-Year Writing Course at WSU

Expectations and Goals for First-Year Writing at Westfield State University

As you may already recognize through your past experiences with writing in high school, when writing for a part-time job, or even while writing your college entrance essay, today it is pretty tough to get through life without being a skilled communicator. That means using writing effectively. Writing is not just something you will do in the two composition classes you take here at Westfield State, but something you will do in whatever career you choose or in whatever job you take. Hopefully, you will leave Westfield feeling more confident about your abilities to communicate in all areas of your life--personal, professional, and social. You may find yourself writing an application to graduate school, to apply for a promotion, to nominate yourself for political office, or you may use it to win that grant to support your new business, or to apply for travel to a foreign place. Writing may not play a huge role in your career, but you may make use of your writing abilities when connecting with a grandparent, writing a speech for your best friend’s wedding, or composing a letter to your child’s teacher on a matter of concern.

Westfield wants to help prepare you to handle the array of occasions for which you might need strong communication abilities. That is why we expect you to take and complete English Composition I (Rhetoric and Composition) and English Composition II (Writing about Texts) during your first year.

We have designed two versions of English Composition I (English 101), one that meets three hours a week, and English Composition I-Plus (English 101-P) that meets four hours a week. Both provide you with three credits, and both have the same course objectives, but in English Composition I-Plus, students who may have a bit less experience writing meet an extra hour a week with a seasoned writing professional. We want to provide as much support as possible as you strengthen your abilities to communicate. Both versions of English 101 will help you to develop effective communication and writing skills.
English 101 or English 101-plus: How do I decide which is right for me?

Should I take English 101?
If most of the characteristics in the following box seem to describe you and your experience, you would probably be most suited to English 101:

- I read newspapers and magazines or books and novels regularly.
- In the past year, I have read for my own enjoyment.
- In high school, I wrote several essays per year.
- I feel fairly comfortable and confident planning and organizing an essay. I have a sense of where to begin, how to paragraph, how to conclude, and how to develop a main argument.
- I have used computers for drafting and revising essays.
- I haven’t had many problems with grammar and punctuation (commas, apostrophes, colons, etc…) and it is fairly easy for me to proofread and edit my own work.
- I consider myself to be a good reader and writer.
- My high school GPA placed me in the top half of my class.
- My SAT verbal score was above 450.

Should I take English 101-Plus?
If most of the characteristics in the following box seem to describe you and your experience, you would probably be most suited to English 101-Plus:

- I usually don’t read unless I have to.
- In high school, I didn’t do much writing.
- I am often unsure how to organize my ideas: where to begin, how to paragraph, how to conclude and how to develop and support a main idea or point.
- I don’t often use computers to write and revise my work.
- I have significant problems proofreading my work. I struggle with grammar and punctuation: commas, apostrophes, colons, etc…
- I don’t think I am a strong writer.
- My high school GPA placed me in the lower half of my class.
- My SAT verbal score was below 450.
Explaining and Validating Your Choice

Whichever option you choose, you’ll be asked to write an essay explaining that choice when you come to campus for orientation. This essay will serve the following purposes:

1. It will help assure us that you have thought carefully about your decision
2. It will allow seasoned writing instructors to evaluate your decision in light of the writing skill displayed in your essay. If there is a profound mismatch between the course you’ve chosen and the writing ability as demonstrated in your essay, you will be encouraged to change your decision.

Since this essay does have some impact on which course you take, we would like to see your best writing abilities displayed. We will ask you to write your essay in a forty-minute time period in an auditorium on campus. You can prepare by reviewing the descriptions of the two courses and comparing the checklists above with your abilities and writing history. You cannot bring any paper into the auditorium with you, but you will be given a clean copy of this information (as well as paper upon which to write your essay), which you may use and reference while writing your essay.

After reading and evaluating your essay, we report your course placement (as recommended by the readers of your essay) to the Registrar, who will help you to register for your fall 2014 classes.

Writing at WSU after the First Year

Choosing the right first-year writing courses is not just about passing the course or receiving a particular grade. These composition classes are meant to help provide you with a foundation for all of the writing you will do at WSU. You will be writing in many of your classes, and your writing abilities will help to determine your success in whichever major you choose, whether it is Criminal Justice, Education, Biology, Movement Science, English, Psychology, etc…

If you are still uncertain and would like to discuss your options further, come prepared to ask questions at orientation. We in the composition program are happy to explain these options to you, answer questions and discuss our expectations.

If you have questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact Dr. Jennifer DiGrazia, Composition Coordinator at WSU at jdigrazia@westfield.ma.edu.

(adapted from Professor Beth Ann Rothermel and requirements/placement procedures at Eastern Connecticut State University)